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TAGS: ETTC KNNP KSTC MNUC PARM PREL TU
SUBJECT: TURKEY SEIZES IRANIAN CONTAINERS WITH SUSPECTED
BOMB-MAKING MATERIAL BOUND FOR VENEZUELA

Classified By: Pol-Mil Counselor A. Godfrey, Reasons 1.4 (b,d)

¶1. (C) On December 31, MFA DDG Ahmet Muhtar Gun confirmed for us media reporting the previous day that Turkish Customs seized 22 shipping containers originating from Iran bound for Venezuela, containing drums of nitrate and sulphite chemicals and dismantled laboratory instruments, which could possibly be used for making bombs. Although he did not have additional details, Gun told us that the Turkish National Intelligence Organization "swarmed" the Port of Mersin when it learned of the seizure. Mustafa Yurkakul, Gun's section chief, said the MFA is mindful of UNSC Resolution 1747's decision prohibiting Iran from transferring "arms and related materiel," and is awaiting a formal investigation report to make a determination whether the shipment is in violation of the resolution. In a separate meeting on December 31, Turkish Customs Enforcement's Anti-Smuggling and Narcotics Department Head Mehmet Akilli provided us with the initial investigation's findings and showed us photographs of the shipping containers and drums of chemicals.

¶2. (C) Akilli noted the following about the seizure:

-- The containers originating from Iran were transported into Turkey via the Gurbulak Customs Port of Entry on the Iranian / Turkish Border. The manifest claimed that the containers held tractor spare parts. The trucks were allowed into Turkey for transshipment by ship via the Port of Mersin in southern Turkey.

-- Once the truck entered the Port of Mersin, Customs performed a risk analysis and diverted the truck to an x-ray unit. The x-ray image showed a number of crates containing drums and technical equipment, which were not consistent with the declared manifest. The container was opened by a team of Custom Inspection officers and Custom Enforcement officers.

-- In each container were wooden crates and metal drums. The crates contained dismantled laboratory equipment (no further information was provided) and the drums appeared to be filled with sodium nitrate (labeled "Dualoble Nitro" on the drums) and sulfite.

-- The crates were marked for delivery to the Ministry of Defense of Venezuela as the consignee and some were marked as military parts.

-- The declared value for shipment was USD \$5,500,000.

-- The Turkish Atomic Energy Authority (TAEK) was contacted. TAEK officials inspected the shipment for possible

radiological material, but none were found. TAEK also checked the Turkish Export Control list for dual-use or other sensitive items and determined the chemicals and laboratory instruments were not on these lists.

-- Since some crates were marked as military items, the Turkish Military is also investigating the items to ensure they do not fall under any military restrictions.

-- Upon seizure of this shipment, Turkish Customs turned the investigation over to the prosecutors office for further investigation and determination.

13. (C) Comment: The MFA has told us over the last two years that the GOT has stepped up monitoring of Iranian shipments transiting Turkey, including through random inspections at the Gurbulak border crossing. This seizure is one tangible example of Turkey's heightened vigilance to prevent illicit shipments from Iran. The willingness to share information with us so early on in a sensitive investigation is also an indication of the close cooperation we enjoy with the GOT on nonproliferation issues. Post will continue to monitor the investigation and assist as appropriate, but we caution that now that the investigation has entered the stage where it is managed by the fiercely independent Prosecutor's Office, it may be difficult to track its progress. End Comment.

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Jeffrey